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Discourse Communities in Sales

In my first sales role, I was a door to door salesman for a company called Weed Man Lawn Care. This was not an average first job. This was not working behind a counter or at a cash register or talking to customers who came into the store and already had interest in at least one product in a store. Rather, this was me getting into a van at 3:00 PM, being driven to a predetermined destination, walking from home to home, no matter what the weather, until I was picked up at 7:00 at night. Four hour shifts aren’t bad, right? Well how about when you match that with constantly being told no, probably close to 100 times a day. What about if the pressure was high enough to the point where if one doesn’t acquire a few quotes a shift, then they will be fired from their position. That was my introduction into the world of work. The world of sales is not an easy path, and definitely is not for most people. The word no has turned from something that I never want to hear to a word that when I do hear, it doesn’t matter, because I want to know why the answer was no, and what I can do to turn that no into a yes. The main roles of a salesperson are to build rapport with potential clients, to understand the needs of the customer, and to introduce a product or service that they believe will help that person. Sadly, this isn’t how most people view a salesperson. When people think of a salesman, they think that they are just going to say and do whatever it takes to make a sale. In some cases this is true, but that is not what the role of a salesperson is. Salespeople are those who are willing to take rejection over and over again for a product that they believe is worth trying to get people interested in.

There are multiple sales techniques that are used depending on certain situations and certain products. There is however, a sales cycle that is relatively the same no matter what one is doing. This is called the Cycle of the Sale, and it is extremely important for anyone interested in this career field to fully understand. The cycle that I will focus on mostly is a professional consultative selling-Cycle of the sale. This cycle goes like this: Pre-approach, Approach, Introduction, Demonstration, Close, and Cash Collection. Cash collection is self-explanatory, but it is also preventing buyer remorse by having the customer explain to them why they bought in the first place. An important part of this post-sale conversation is to communicate to each other like friends rather than businessperson to consumer. This also aids in creating testimonials to show future prospects and help gain interest.

What is the pre-approach? Pre-approach in the traditional sense is researching a target market and figuring out their needs, but is much less centered around the customer and more focused on obtaining talking points to persuade a sale to occur. However, times are changing. George Boykin of Demand Media, wrote in his article “Pros & Cons of the Pre-approach Sales Techniques”, that there is a new selling dynamic called Relationship Selling. In this new type of selling, all the emphasis is on the customer, building a relationship of trust, and helping the customer “grow and prosper”. Relationship selling is basically the same, but with distinct differences. Relationship selling is all about customer satisfaction and ensuring that the salesperson fulfills their needs, and is no longer creating talking points and making a good closing pitch to sway their customers to buy their product or service. There are many benefits of gathering information relevant to prospects. By researching a client, one can learn what their true needs are, what their buyer’s problems are that need to be solved, if they can afford specific solutions to their problems, and, if they are selling business-to-business, if the person that they are talking to is the decision maker. Those are all very important aspects of a sale, and if a salesman doesn’t know any one of those things about a prospect, then their odds of closing that deal drop dramatically. The Pre-approach is just the first step in the cycle of the sale, but is an essential part of closing the deal before it even begins.

The next step of the sales cycle is the approach. The approach is not the actual process of walking up to someone or into that first meeting with them. In fact, the approach is the act of setting up a time to meet with a customer, whether it be over the phone, email, or walking up to a customer in a store, it happens before the initial conversation. That is what I was told by a past mentor. However, research on the internet says differently. For example, Wendy Connick, a sales expert, mentioned in her article “5 Types of Sales Approaches” that there are multiple ways to ‘approach’ a customer, depending on the personality of that salesperson. The first type that the article mentions is “The instant buddy”. This approach is effective because it is proven that if a customer likes the sales rep. on an emotional level. This type can also fail miserably. The friendship has to be authentic, otherwise the customer will read right through it and the sale will not be closed in the favor of the business. “The Guru” is the next type on the list. The Guru is much more information based and less emotional. Although the salesperson and the customer aren’t going to connect on a personal level, the customer can be satisfied knowing that they have a better understanding of the industry because they have put in the time to know their stuff. Next up is “The Consultant”. The consultant uses both the tactics of the guru and the instant buddy together. This is a very hard tactic to excel at using however, because of the time it takes to both become an expert in the art of sales as well as being friendly all the time. The “Networker” sets up and keeps a mass number of friends, constantly meeting new people and has a solid flow of leads that can give enough of a population to gain sales from.

The last type of salesperson that is mentioned is known as the “Hard Seller”. This method of selling is not generally accepted either by customers, or by the business community. The hard sell is putting massive amounts of pressure on an individual to buy in that very instant. Both “5 Types of Sales Approaches” by Wendy Connick and “Different Sales Approaches” by Jerry Shaw agreed that the hard sell is usually not only not well-received by customers but also gives salespeople the bad reputation that they have. This approach is even considered to be unethical to some standards, and if one is in the business of having repeat customers and a good word-of-mouth reputation, then this is not the technique to use. The approach is a crucial element when establishing initial rapport with a consumer, and this as well as the pre-approach can set up for a strong close or a lost sale.